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Enemies at the Gateway: Regional Populist Discourse and the Fight Against Oil Pipelines on Canada's West Coast

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This paper analyzes discursive storylines of opponents of Northern Gateway—a proposed pipeline and tanker project designed to link Alberta oil sands producers to international markets via Canada's West Coast. It explores how regional concerns about Northern Gateway helped galvanize a movement led by regional First Nations, environmentalists, and settler communities, all of whom opposed Gateway as a means to protect regional ecosystems—and the local communities dependent on them—from "extra-regional" Gateway-backing elites. By articulating arguments against Northern Gateway with salient collective action frames concerning ecological sustainability, regional identity, Indigenous sovereignty, social justice, and democratic agency, this anti-Gateway "discourse coalition" helped contribute to the project's ultimate collapse in 2016. In this paper, we critically engage with Ernesto Laclau's theorization of Populism to analyse this movement as a form of "regional ecological populism," explaining how a shift in spatial framing from the national to the regional enabled a particular populist narrative to emerge. Furthermore, we relate Laclau's framework to Martin Hajer's concept of discursive "storylines" and William Gamson's analysis of "collective action frames" to provide a grounded analysis of how coalitions articulate populist *storylines* designed to mobilize diverse movement constituents. To do so we conduct a frame analysis of communications materials produced by several prominent First Nations and environmental organizations publicly mobilizing against Northern Gateway, tracing how these groups articulated a common *regional ecological populist* storyline. Finally, we end with some thoughts about the possibilities and challenges for scaling up regional ecological populism in Canada.

Keywords: populism, pipelines, discourse coalitions, climate change, framing, Canada

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, defenders of Canada's oil and gas industry have turned to nationalist and conservative populist storylines to frame development as a boon to Canadian workers and taxpayers, while denigrating environmentalist opponents as foreign-backed elites (Neubauer, 2019). The apotheosis of this tactic came in 2012, when the Federal government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper rushed to the defense of the controversial Northern Gateway pipeline and tanker

project, a proposal designed to reach new export markets by linking Alberta oil sands producers to the port of Kitimat, British Columbia on Canada's West Coast (2). Faced with an anti-Gateway movement of regionally-based First Nations, environmental groups, and local communities, the Harper government denounced environmental groups testifying at Gateway's federal project review as "foreign funded radicals" and liberal elites hijacking the review process and harming working Canadian families (Oliver, 2012).

This dramatic episode helped galvanize a nascent movement oriented around the protection of regional ecosystems—and the communities dependent on them—from an alliance of "extra-regional" Gateway-backing elites. Interestingly, this movement reproduced key components of the inside-outside national-populist "storyline" (Hajer, 1993, p. 47) pioneered by industry defenders (Gunster and Saurette, 2014; Neubauer, 2019), albeit with a very different spatial framing (Gunster and Neubauer, 2018). By articulating arguments against Northern Gateway with salient collective action frames (Gamson, 1992, p. 7; Taylor, 2000, p. 511–517) concerning ecological sustainability, regional identity, Indigenous sovereignty, social justice, and democratic agency, this anti-Gateway "discourse coalition" (Hajer, 1993, p. 45) sparked a powerful social movement, ultimately contributing to the project's collapse in 2016.

To analyse the anti-Gateway movement, we engage with Laclau's (1977; 2007) theorization of Populism, relating his framework to Hajer's (1993, p. 43) concept of discursive "storylines" and Gamson's (1992, p. 7) work on "collective action frames." In doing so, we explore two core research questions. First, how did a shift in spatial framing from the national to the regional enable different interpretations of the project to emerge? Second, how did opponents combine regional spatial frames with collective action frames to articulate a *regional ecological populist* storyline that encouraged diverse social actors to make common cause against an externalized enemy?

We begin with an examination of the conditions which enabled the emergence of this political movement. We follow this with a frame analysis of communications materials produced by several prominent First Nations and environmental organizations mobilizing against Northern Gateway between 2010 and 2015. Finally, we conclude with some thoughts about the possibilities and challenges for scaling up regional ecological populism in Canada.

CANADIAN EXTRACTIVISM, POPULIST ARTICULATION, AND NORTHERN GATEWAY

Widely regarded as a seminal theorist of populism (Kaltwasser and Taggart, 2017), Ernesto Laclau identifies the agonistic dichotomy of "the people" vs. "the power-bloc" as the foundation of populist politics. Such dichotomies have no fixed, transhistorical meaning, but emerge through a process of discursive articulation through which different actors come to understand themselves as sharing a common enemy. According to Laclau (2007), this "populist reason" rests upon three interconnected elements:

1. The capacity of distinct social actors with unfulfilled social demands—grievances which dominant social institutions seem unable to address—to discursively link those demands into "an equivalential chain" (p. 77). The lack of any "abstract common feature underlying all social grievances" *a priori* requires that the "equivalential chain… be expressed through the cathexis of a singular element" (p. 96). This may involve the articulation of a single overarching demand as a kind of master/empty signifier which establishes the other demands as equivalential to each other in the signifying chain.
2. The construction of a popular identity (i.e., "the people") out of heterogeneous aggrieved actors who make common cause by reference to the "unfulfilled" nature of their particular demands (p. 86). It is only if these actors "perceive that their neighbours have other, equally unsatisfied demands" that an "equivalential relation is established between them" (p. 73). By allowing for "a set of particular identities or interests… to regroup themselves as equivalential" to each other (p. 19), this process sponsors "the construction of a popular identity" (p. 77).
3. The symbolic establishment "of an internal frontier dividing society into two camps" (p. 77), distinguishing an aggrieved people from those actors and institutions unwilling or unable to satisfy their demands. For Laclau, this inability/refusal to meet social demands is crucial in the construction of popular identities, since the heterogeneity of social life means the aggrieved actors have no *a priori* appeal to ontological unity. It is only through their common "confrontation with" an unresponsive "oligarchic power" that they come to experience their interests as "analogous with each other" (p. 19). This power generally includes actors positioned as economic, political, or cultural elites, though it may also include those framed as "outsiders" or "others."

The history of conservative populism in Canada suggests that Laclau's "internal frontier" can be understood along both *socioeconomic* and *spatial-geographic* lines. In recent decades defenders of Canada's fossil fuel industry have attacked their opponents as elite ideologues exaggerating the environmental costs of extractivist development to line their pockets and fulfill their radical agenda, betraying workers and taxpayers dependent on the industry (Gunster and Saurette, 2014, Neubauer, 2019, p. 13–15). This discourse has often been mapped onto the terrain of national identity. Industry and its allies in government, civil society, and media have consistently deployed "patterns of emphasis (on jobs and government revenues) and omission (of corporate profits and low royalty rates)" to perform "a kind of 'symbolic nationalization' of the industry" (Gunster and Saurette, 2014, p. 345). In doing so, extractivist development becomes articulated "almost exclusively as a kind of collective national enterprise to serve the public good," with its critics framed as outside the nation.

One particularly salient example was the Federal government's strident defense of Enbridge's Northern Gateway project, a proposal to link Alberta's tar sands via pipeline to the port of Kitimat on British Columbia's North Coast, after which it would be shipped to East Asian refineries via supertanker (Neubauer, 2019, p. 6). By the time public hearings for Gateway's federal review were initiated in 2012, the proposal had generated significant opposition from Indigenous organizations, environmental groups, and local communities based in British Columbia—the province through which much of the project would be routed. Notably, project defenders responded by framing the project as a vital "nation building" project (Barney, 2017) under attack by foreign funded enemies of Canada (Neubauer, 2019, p. 13–15).

In an infamous public letter published in January 2012, Natural Resources Minister Oliver (2012) explained how Canada needed "to diversify our markets in order to create jobs and economic growth for *Canadians across this country*" to "ensure the financial security of *Canadians and their families*" (emphasis added). Drawing on research by blogger Vivian Krause highlighting the funding some Gateway opponents had received from American foundations (Krause, 2012), the letter attacked organizations testifying at the project's review hearings as "*foreign funded radicals*" (emphasis added). Paid by "*foreign special interest groups*" and American "*jet setting celebrities*" to "hijack" the nation's regulatory apparatus, these groups were described as pursuing "their radical agenda" no matter "the cost to *Canadian families* in lost jobs and economic growth" (emphasis added). This narrative was recirculated and endorsed in the columns of conservative newspaper columnists, commentary of conservative think tank scholars, and the blogs of industry-supporting advocacy groups (Neubauer, 2019, p. 13–15). The result was a powerful national populist storyline: Canadian environmentalists opposed to new pipelines were not concerned citizens with legitimate grievances, but radical elites, foreign invaders, and enemies of the Canadian people.

ANTI-GATEWAY DISCOURSE COALITIONS AND REGIONAL POPULIST STORYLINES

The contemporary structure of the industry necessitates this type of "symbolic nationalization" if the sector is to retain public support (Neubauer, 2019, p. 11–13). Since the oil sands' neoliberal restructuring and expansion in the 1990s, high corporate compensation rates, generous royalty and taxation regimes, and low employment intensity have conspired to establish an extraordinarily profitable industry that nevertheless provides a relatively weak source of job creation, worker income, and state revenue per dollar of investment (Pratt, 2007, p. 54; Boychuk, 2010; Campanella, 2012; Fast, 2014, p. 36–53; Barney, 2017, p. 4, 7, 30–34).

Yet there is nothing about populism that necessitates its articulation with a national space or conservative worldview. Here, we analyse the anti-Gateway movement's collective action frames and narrative storylines as a means to operationalize Laclau's approach for the study of social movement communications. We explore how the fight against Northern Gateway led to the articulation of an ecological populist storyline oriented around regional places and identities, ecological sustainability, Indigenous sovereignty, local democracy, and social justice. We also examine how place mediated this storyline *as a frame*.

We believe an analysis of frames offers a grounded, granular means of studying populist discourse that is broadly compatible with Laclau's overall approach. We believe this mode of analysis builds on Laclau's theorization of populist reason as the discursive articulation of popular demands into an equivalential chain. In particular, we connect the *negative* dimension of populist reason highlighted by Laclau—in which demands are symbolically linked through their shared refusal—to an analysis of the *affirmative* discursive affinities (Hajer, 1993) between similar demands which also facilitate their equivalential articulation.

Frames can be understood as the component pieces of larger discourses—the various metaphors, imageries and cognitive heuristics actors use to understand themselves and their relation to the larger world (Taylor, 2000, p. 511–517). Different frames allow subjects to come to different interpretations of the social world by emphasizing particular aspects of phenomena while downplaying others (Hajer, 1993, p. 45). By framing unwanted social or ecological phenomena in particular ways, actors give them "a specific meaning," answering "politically essential questions such as 'Who is responsible?' and 'what should be done?'" (Hajer, 1993, p. 44).

It should be noted that some strands of frame analysis (Lakoff, 2010) have been criticized (Brulle, 2010) for—among other things—positing a static conception of discourse which sees frames as relatively fixed or pregiven. This poses difficulties for studying the emergent and contingent nature of social movement discourse, problematizing any operationalization of Laclau's poststructural approach to analyzing populism. However, we draw on approaches to framing—extensively developed by Taylor (2000), Hajer (1993), and Gunster and Neubauer (2018)—that see social movement frames as fundamentally contingent and contested. In this approach, the meanings of different frameworks emerge from the discursive activity of concrete movement actors and the evolving political, historical, and cultural context within which discourse takes shape.

According to Hajer, for instance, the framing of political conflict is both conducted by and constitutive of "discourse coalitions," decentralized yet allied groups of actors aligned around a common discourse (Hajer, 1993, p. 45). Hajer defines discourse as "a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorizations that are produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities" (1993, p. 44). Together, coalition actors work to articulate separate yet *discursively affinitive* frames into an overarching storyline around which they can organize politically, providing a framework for collective action by articulating plausible causes of and potential solutions to a given problem (p. 47).

When coalitions are shut out from policy-making institutions, coalition actors must mobilize broad-based social movements

that can generate the necessary political capital to impose their storyline on the policy field. To achieve this, organizers may seek to "reframe" different phenomena to increase the resonance of their storylines with potential movement participants (Taylor, 2000, p. 511–517). As Dorceta Taylor notes, this often involves frame "bridging," or the symbolic grafting of "two ideologically compatible but structurally separate frames that refer to the same issue" (p. 512). We argue that by bridging arguments against Northern Gateway with a regional spatial frame—rather than the national one favored by industry proponents—the anti-Gateway coalition generated contrasting interpretations of the project's distribution of costs and benefits, the equity of that distribution, and corresponding accounts of the "people" and the "elites."

This spatial bridging was articulated with the anti-Gateway coalition's "collective action frames," which Snow and Benford (in Gamson, 1992) describe as "action oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate social movement actions and campaigns" (p. 7). Gamson (1992, p. 7) notes that social movement actors seek to mobilize constituents through their deployment of collective action frames related to injustice, agency, and identity. *Injustice* frames are critical in establishing any antagonistic politics, as they assign blame for social ills to "motivated human actors" responsible for "harm or suffering" (Gamson, 1992, p. 7). *Identity* frames motivate political responses to these injustices by nominating collective actors seen as most aggrieved by them, positioning a collective "we" against an offending "they." *Agency* frames provide "some sense of collective efficacy," implying the aforementioned "we" can alter "conditions or policies through collective action."

Articulated together, these frames enable actors to constitute collective *identities*, identify *injustices* committed against those identities, and amplify perceptions of *agency* on the part of movement actors in overcoming these injustices (Gamson, 1992, p. 7). Correspondingly, the anti-Gateway discourse coalition leveraged opponents' connections to local place to articulate a *regional populist storyline* in which representatives of various *regional identities* (British Columbians, First Nations, environmentalists, etc.) exercised their democratic *agency* by opposing *injustices* imposed by Gateway-supporting elites from outside the region. In many respects, this process was analogous to Laclau's description of populist reason, in which the articulation of an equivalential chain of unfulfilled demands enables the establishment of an internal frontier between aggrieved "popular" actors and the elites which refuse to meet their demands.

The movement identities constructed by anti-pipeline movements in Canada have emerged from political alliances between First Nations and various settler activists and communities. Within the context of ongoing regimes of settler colonial governance and territorial dispossession, such alliances are rather politically contingent. Yet this contingency resonates with Laclau's (2007) approach to populist reason, in which coalitions of heterogeneous actors come to see themselves "as analogous with each other" not through any *a priori* ontic unity, but through their mutual "confrontation with oligarchic power" (p. 19). This perception of shared political identity occurs as a particular demand emerges as an empty signifier through which other demands become equivalential; the broader the coalition, the emptier the signifier necessary to anchor the equivalential chain (p. 97). We argue that the rejection of Gateway became just such a signifier, standing in for various demands appealing to different actors within the movement.

In his recent work Laclau (2007) envisions popular identities as emerging from a mutually recognized *lack* or *absence*, namely, the inability of the oligarchy to meet different actors' demands. While this logic partially explains the coherence of the anti-Gateway coalition, an analysis of coalition storylines—and the frames constituting them—reveals the importance of more *affirmative* aspects in knitting together diverse actors into a shared popular identity. As Hajer (1993) notes, discourse coalitions create storylines out of separate discursive strands by leveraging their "discursive affinities": the "similar way[s]" unique frames have of "conceptualizing the world" (p. 47). In the case of Gateway, such affinities were grounded in the interdependencies between people and place. The anti-Gateway coalition invoked these affinities to build a populist storyline in which oligarchic actors from *outside the region* posed an existential threat to the *local space/places* that different regional actors depended upon for their livelihoods, identity, and community.

In our study, the focus on place helps ground the equivalential chains of populist reason in a particular materiality; namely, collective interdependencies with specific places. The places in which we live—and the ecologies which underpin them—are not merely discursive frames, but also the material basis for our economic systems of production, political jurisdictions, physical dwellings, built communities, and sociocultural identities. The mediation of populist storylines by different spatial frames thereby enables different interpretations of the world and our relation to it which, while discursively constructed, are grounded in a materiality as solid as the earth beneath our feet. In the case of Gateway, understanding the material interdependencies between different actors and particular places is crucial to understanding how these actors came to see their demands as equivalential to each other.

Local Place-Based Identity and Ecological Risk

By mediating claims about the Gateway project via a national space, the national popular storyline of pipeline proponents symbolically sutured the interests of oil sands firms and investors to the "average Canadian worker" or "taxpayer" (Neubauer, 2019, p. 11–13). Yet when it comes to tar sands extraction and transportation, the most salient spatial frames are often *local*. Accordingly, Gateway's opponents emphasized movement frames which articulated the project as a threat to *regional* identities.

The carbon-intensive nature of the oil sands development (Nikiforuk, 2010, p. 127–145) has drawn the ire of the global climate movement (Davidson and Gismondi, 2011, p. 111–141). Yet this development also generates severe *local risks*, as the extraction, transportation, and refining of bitumen—a toxic, sludge-like substance—has traditionally produced significant air,

water and land pollution (Nikiforuk, 2010, p. 60–111; Davidson and Gismondi, 2011, p. 111–141). Local ecological and health impacts have often been disastrous, especially in communities located downstream from extraction sites or tailing ponds (Nikiforuk, 2010, p. 60–111; Davidson and Gismondi, 2011, p. 111–141; Preston, 2013, p. 43–47).

In the case of Northern Gateway these local impacts were particularly worrisome, and many regional actors recoiled at the devastating ecological, economic, and health effects of a potential pipeline leak or tanker spill (Hoberg, 2013, p. 380–382). Pipeline leaks were a serious concern for a project proposed to cross over a thousand rivers and streams, including some of the world's most productive remaining salmon habitats (Stendie, 2013, p. 2). Gateway also would have brought as many as 300 supertankers a year through the remote port of Kitimat (Nikiforuk, 2010, p. 123)—an unprecedented level of traffic on BC's difficult to navigate North Coast—while passing through rich marine ecosystems (Panofsky, 2011). In return for accepting these risks, the province would gain a relatively small number of short-term construction jobs and a handful of permanent positions in pipeline maintenance. And because Canadian provinces cannot claim royalties on resources transported through their jurisdiction, BC would gain few long-term tax revenues. All of this primed regional identities of local actors and communities dependent on healthy local ecosystems for both their cultural identities and much of their economic activity, whether the province's large-scale fisheries or its booming ecotourism sector (Lee, 2012).

The relationship between local place, ecological risk, and identity was especially salient for many First Nation communities located along the project route. The pipeline "would [have crossed] the traditional territories of at least 60 different First Nation communities, and would potentially impact the lands of many others, the vast majority of whom [had] not completed a modern land claims agreement" (Panofsky, 2011, p. 22–23). As Davidson and Gismondi note (Davidson and Gismondi, 2011), Indigenous communities located near resource extraction projects often face unique environmental and health risks, as they are often heavily reliant "on the services provided by their local watershed for food and livelihood provision" (p. 183). Just as importantly, relationships to traditional territories are constitutive of the modes of social organization and cultural identities of many First Nation communities, and are intimately connected to contemporary anti-colonial struggles. As political scientist Coulthard (2014) explains:

> Indigenous anticolonialism, including Indigenous anticapitalism, is best understood as a struggle primarily inspired by and oriented around the question of land—a struggle not only for land in the material sense, but also deeply informed by what the land as system of reciprocal relations and obligations can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in non-dominating and non-exploitative terms… I call this place-based foundation of Indigenous decolonial thought and practice grounded normativity, by which I mean the modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and non-human others over time (p. 13).

Regional Injustice and Ecological Populism

The risk to local places threatened regional identities predicated on their economic, cultural, and political interdependence with those same places, increasing their salience relative to the national identities primed by Gateway's proponents. This allowed a broad-based regional discourse coalition of Indigenous organizations, settler Canadian communities, and environmental groups to articulate diverse regional identity frames within a common storyline. More than the simple *presence* of local risks, it was their *unjust distribution* that motivated these actors. While proponents claimed that Northern Gateway would produce significant economic benefits for BC, opponents countered that most immediate economic gains would accrue to Enbridge and project investors (Lee, 2012, p. 10–15; Neubauer, 2019). Similarly, the expanded upstream bitumen production Gateway was designed to facilitate would primarily generate long-term benefits for Albertan and international companies active in the oil sands and the banks which financed them. And the increased provincial tax revenue generated by the project would mostly accrue to Alberta.

A second set of injustices were related to the perceived democratic unaccountability of the federal government and its environmental review process. Much of this stemmed from widespread public perception of industry capture. In the years following their initial election victory in 2006, many critics had come to see the Conservative government as a puppet of Alberta's oil industry, given their ties to industry lobbyists; budget cuts to ecological research; legislative inaction on climate change; gag orders on government climate and environmental scientists; and the use of public monies for expensive pro-oil sands public relations campaigns (Cayley-Daoust and Girard, 2012; Nikiforuk, 2013; Turner, 2013, p. 136–189; Gutstein, 2014).

Regional critics had similar concerns about the project review process. Traditionally, federal legislation mandated that major energy project proposals receive approval from two regulatory bodies—the National Energy Board (NEB) and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (CEAA) (Van Hinte et al., 2007, p. 127). Yet in 2009 the federal government authorized the NEB to carry out a single "Joint Review Panel" (JRP) for the project, with community hearings to be held throughout Alberta and BC starting in January 2012 (Gunster and Neubauer, 2018, p. 717). As the NEB was industry-funded and largely staffed by corporate insiders, environmentalists doubted its ability to conduct an impartial review. These fears seemed legitimated by the announcement that the JRP would largely exclude upstream and downstream climate change impacts from its consideration. Local actors were also angry at the panel's lack of regional representation, as well as "an agreement between the Federal and B.C. governments in which the latter waived its right to conduct an independent provincial project assessment" (p. 717–718).

Concerns about procedural fairness were turbocharged in January 2012, when the federal government publicly attacked

environmental organizations participating in the JRP of being "foreign funded radicals," using funding from US charitable foundations to "hijack" the review process and sabotage Canadian working families (Oliver, 2012). This national populist storyline was explicitly used by the Conservatives to publicly legitimize two new pieces of federal legislation—C-38 and C-45—which critics alleged were designed to gut Canada's environmental regulation and project assessment regime (Hoberg, 2013, p. 375; Nikiforuk, 2013; Coulthard, 2014, p. 151–180). Together the two bills removed a host of environmental safeguards for various aquatic and land based ecosystems; steeply curtailed public involvement in future reviews; and shifted authority for final project approval from the NEB to the Gateway-supporting cabinet, rendering widespread public involvement in the review process legally irrelevant (Neubauer, 2019, p. 14).

These injustice frames were particularly relevant for Northern Gateway's Indigenous opponents. The grounded normativity described by Coulthard, in which modes of social organization of numerous Indigenous peoples are informed by deep reciprocal relations with their traditional territories, gains political salience in the context of a national colonial project and resource economy both dependent on the continuous appropriation, governance, and exploitation of those territories (Coulthard, 2014, p. 1–24, 51–78). As such, Corntassel and Bryce (2011) argue, "[b]eing Indigenous today means engaging in a struggle to reclaim and regenerate one's relational, place-based existence" (p. 152). Yet unlike in most of Canada, where "treaties were signed in which Aboriginal people 'ceded and surrendered' their traditional territories," most of British Columbia was seized without the signing of nation-to-nation treaties (Panofsky, 2011, p. 98). As a result courts have awarded many BC First Nations heightened legal standing concerning rights and title, with rulings affirming that Indigenous communities' precolonial territorial sovereignty remains unextinguished in large swaths of the province (Coulthard, 2014, p. 1–24).

As such, explains Hoberg (2013), various First Nations opposed Gateway both due to the potential "impact of spills on culturally and economically important resources" and as a means "to force attention to their broader demands for rights and title" (p. 376). The proposed route ran through large swaths of unceded territory, and the JRP had no jurisdiction to make decisions regarding Indigenous title (Panofsky, 2011, p. 28). Furthermore, many Indigenous opponents accused the JRP process of violating their rights under section 35 of the Constitution, which mandates that First Nation communities be appropriately consulted and accommodated concerning development projects which may affect their Aboriginal or treaty rights. In their view, negotiations over Gateway should have proceeded on a nation to nation basis between Ottawa and affected Nations, instead of Indigenous communities participating in the JRP as merely another interest group (p. 77). Some communities refused to participate in the JRP process entirely, while others that did engage nevertheless condemned it as illegitimate.

These concerns were amplified by the federal government's passage of Bill C-45 in 2012. By facilitating the leasing out of reserve lands with minimal community input, weakening environmental regulations, and narrowing the scope of projects requiring federal reviews, the legislation was widely perceived as a stealth attack on Indigenous rights and title and the capacity of First Nations to enforce environmental safeguards on their own lands (Coulthard, 2014, p. 151–180). This perceived injustice became a decisive factor in launching the 2012 "Idle No More" movement, a Canada-wide series of protests against the colonial state which made the repeal of C-45 one of its central demands.

According to Laclau (2007, p. 65–172), popular identities emerge through the establishment of an equivalential chain of demands, uniting heterogeneous social actors against the forces perceived as responsible for their disparate grievances. This "equivalential chain" is often "expressed through the cathexis of a singular element," precisely because the radical heterogeneity of social life means that populist discourse cannot simply discover "an abstract common feature underlying all social grievances" (96). Rather, it occurs via "a performative operation constituting the [equivalential] chain as such."

The Gateway project and its perceived injustices provided just such a "singular element," through which actors could articulate a chain of equivalential demands related to Indigenous sovereignty; protection of coastal ecosystems, economies and cultures; climate change; industry capture of the state apparatus; and regional democratic accountability. Such common cause did not emerge out of an *a priori* unified regional identity—an unlikely development given long-standing tensions between settler and Indigenous communities generated by the Canadian colonial project. Rather, a shared identity emerged out of a *regional ecological populist* storyline emphasizing diverse regional actors' shared dependence upon the ecological integrity of local places. Local spaces and places came to embody the "privileged signifiers… which condense in themselves the signification of a whole antagonistic camp" (Laclau, 2007, p. 86).

If identities, cultures and economies dependent on the integrity of regional ecologies enabled the construction of a regional popular discourse, how did movement actors come to articulate an "internal frontier" dividing themselves from their enemies? Through the construction of a shared storyline in which regional popular forces were engaged in a democratic struggle against a cabal of *hostile extra-regional elites*—Albertan and international oil companies; the Albertan and federal governments; Chinese investors; international finance capital; Bay Street banks and investment firms, etc.—imposing Gateway on the region. Interestingly, this inside-outside narrative replicated the populist foreign invader storyline deployed by project supporters. Yet the mediation of this narrative through a regional-local rather than national spatial frame enabled the populist storyline to be recast with a different set of actors in the roles of hero and villain.

Regional Agency and Ecological Popular

Successful framing strategies for grassroots movements must leverage political opportunities that enhance movement participation and growth (Gamson, 1992, p. 6: Taylor, 2000, p. 520). As Taylor (2000) explains, "Activists have to be keenly aware of what resources… are available to them

and how to use these resources to initiate and maintain movement activities" (p. 519).

How did the anti-Gateway coalition bring together different yet complementary resources, while taking advantage of political opportunities? Regional environmental groups such as Sierra Club BC and Dogwood Initiative, for instance, had significant financial resources, numerous supporters, and connections to large multinational ENGOs. First Nations organizations such as the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, the Yinka Dene Alliance, and Coastal First Nations had access to an energized movement of activists, many of whom had mobilized in the Idle No More movement in 2012.

Indigenous communities also possessed legal claims to territorial sovereignty on unceded territory. "In March 2010," explains Hoberg, "the Coastal First Nations, an alliance of First Nations on BC's North and Central coasts"—including Wuikinuxv, Heiltsuk, Kitasoo/Xaixais, Nuxalk, Gitga'at, Metlakatla, Old Massett, Skidegate, and Council of the Haida Nation—issued a declaration "'that oil tankers carrying crude oil from the Alberta Tar Sands will not be allowed to transit our lands and waters"' (p. 381). In December of that same year, "the Yinka Dene Alliance, a coalition of six First Nations in the Fraser River watershed"—including the Nadleh Whut'en, Nak'azdli, Takla Lake, Saik'uz, Wet'suwet'en, and Tl'azt'en—issued the Save the Fraser Declaration, which was later signed by more than 60 other First Nations." The Declaration's rejection of Northern Gateway was unequivocal:

> "in upholding our ancestral laws, Title, Rights and responsibilities, we declare: We will not allow the proposed Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipelines, or similar Tar Sands projects, to cross our lands, territories and watersheds, or the ocean migration routes of Fraser River Salmon" (cited in Panofsky, 2011, p. 23).

If the federal regulatory apparatus was widely perceived as insulated from regional democratic pressures, how did the anti-Gateway coalition cultivate a sense of efficacy in potential movement constituents? They framed participation in public consultation less as a means of influencing a regulatory decision, and more as a strategic means of undermining the symbolic legitimacy of the regulator to approve the project.

Anti-Gateway organizations and activists seized upon numerous opportunities to influence the state. These activities served a parallel function of framing project opponents as the legitimate representatives of regional democratic publics, explicitly contrasted with the unaccountable Joint Review Panel (JRP) process. Environmental groups mobilized supporters to sign up to the hearings in unprecedented numbers, forcing the panel to extend hearings by over a year and ensuring that the vast majority of public testimony opposed project approval (Neubauer, 2019, p. 7). In doing so, they simultaneously demonstrated the lack of regional support for Gateway while pre-emptively delegitimizing the JRP's eventual approval of the project.

Opponents held well-attended demonstrations, organized community information sessions, circulated petitions, and commissioned regional polls demonstrating majority opposition to increased tanker traffic (Hoberg, 2013, p. 380–382). They also organized extensive provincial and federal electoral outreach campaigns, recognizing that widespread regional opposition to Gateway provided opposition parties with a valuable wedge issue against the more extractivist-oriented governing parties (Neubauer, 2017). Perhaps the most notable example was an April 2014 municipal referendum held in Kitimat, BC, the terminus of the proposed pipeline (Gunster and Neubauer, 2018, p. 721). In a remarkable feat of grassroots organizing, opponents ultimately persuaded 58% of Kitimat voters to reject the project, "despite Enbridge's significant advertising and public relations expenditures in the small port town" (Gunster and Neubauer, 2018, p. 721).

Regional ENGOs and Indigenous organizations also created multiple opportunities for collaboration in ways which legitimated their claims to regional popular representativeness while undermining the symbolic authority of the JRP and project proponents. Dogwood and Sierra often publicized the activities of both CFN and YDA, regularly releasing blog posts and press releases documenting new signatories to the Save the Fraser Declaration (Neubauer, 2017). Representatives of both organizations signed the Fraser Declaration Solidarity Accord, a petition issued by YDA leadership as a means to publicize Indigenous opponents' broad public support.

Finally, several Indigenous communities launched legal challenges to the JRP's conditional approval of the project in 2013 on the grounds that the panel had not sufficiently consulted affected communities (West Coast Environmental Law, 2015). By bringing communities into the consultation process well after the panel's scoping phase, they argued the federal government had offered them a superficial level of input that did not meet its constitutionally mandated duty to consult and accommodate. Notably, in 2014 multiple ENGOs co-launched the Pull Together campaign, a program that raised "funds for First Nations legally challenging Enbridge's proposed Northern Gateway pipeline" (History, n.d.).

THE ANTI-GATEWAY MOVEMENT AND REGIONAL ECOLOGICAL POPULIST DISCOURSE

In the remainder of this paper, we explore how Gateway's opponents articulated arguments against the project with a regional spatial frame to establish a regional ecological populist storyline. We conduct a frame analysis of communication materials produced by four prominent organizations campaigning against the pipeline between 2011 and 2015. Two prominent First Nations organizations—CFN and the YDA—and ENGO's—Sierra Club BC (SCBC) and Dogwood Initiative (DI)—opposing Gateway were selected for analysis. A sample of 245 texts produced by these organizations between 2011 and 2015 was collected from organization websites and the Canadian Newsstream database. These included blog posts, press releases, issue backgrounders, op-eds, and research reports (see **Table 1**). Materials were analyzed with NVIVO 11, a qualitative analysis software suite.

TABLE 1 | Communications materials produced by sample organizations between 2011 and 2015.

	Backgrounder	Blog Post	Op-eds	Press Release	Reports	Total
CFN	2	9	0	13	1	25
Dogwood	3	101	2	31	0	137
Sierra Club BC	13	30	5	17	0	65
YDA	0	0	1	17	0	18
Total	**18**	**140**	**8**	**78**	**1**	**245**

A frame analysis was conducted, with a focus on using Gamson's (1992) collective action frames to operationalize Laclau's theory of populist reason. Laclau's emphasis on the discursive constitution of popular identities led us to analyse which particular collective *identities*—including regional, Indigenous, Canadian, and socioeconomic—were framed as protagonists in opponent storylines, noting when different actors were described as allied in opposition to the project. Various *injustice* frames were identified as a means to examine the articulation of popular demands within an equivalential chain. These included under attack; unfair distribution of risk and benefit; violation of sovereignty; government corruption/industry capture; and imposition of environmental or economic risk frames. We also noted which actors were framed as elite enemies responsible for the offending injustices, which—when positioned against the collective identity frames—allowed us to trace the establishment of an "internal frontier" separating "popular forces" from the "power bloc." *Agency* frames were included to better understand how opponents mobilized constituents by championing their ability to defeat these elite enemies. Finally, we took note of how popular identities, injustices, and elite enemies were framed spatially; i.e., whether they were bridged with regional, local, national, or global spatial frames.

These frames were generated from multiple sources. Some were identified from a literature review of previous studies of environmental communications and energy politics (Gunster and Saurette, 2014; Neubauer, 2019); Indigenous reconciliation and decolonial politics (Coulthard, 2014); political ecology of the Canadian oil sands and contemporary pipeline projects, and related environmental and economic risks (Nikiforuk, 2010; Davidson and Gismondi, 2011; Lee, 2012; Fast, 2014); and populist politics (Hall, 1988; Laclau, 2007; Frank, 2012). Further frames were identified through a preliminary scoping of a small subsample of the collected communication materials. Finally, frames were added on an emergent basis throughout the coding process.

In what follows we draw on our findings to explore how these groups leveraged these frames to symbolically construct a "regional popular" movement *identity* composed of First Nations, regional communities, British Columbians, and environmental activists exercising political *agency* to address *injustices* imposed by extra-regional Gateway-supporting elites. In doing so, we foreground the role of regional spatial frames in mediating the articulation of what we call a *regional ecological populist storyline*.

Articulating Local Ecological Risk With Regional Identities

In their communications materials, opponents constructed movement identities around a chain of equivalential demands, many of which concerned the economic and ecological risks associated with a pipeline leak or tanker spill. As Laclau's framework suggests, such demands could be treated as equivalential due to their mutually unmet nature. However, there were also discursive affinities linking these demands in a more affirmative fashion: their common reference to threatened regional ecosystems and the diverse communities which depended on them. These threatened local ecosystems were explicitly framed as the basis for the well-being of local residents, establishing the rationale for shared movement identities.

Notably, all four organizations consistently prioritized local risks from a bitumen spill as compared to broader global risks like climate change, while highlighting the common interests of different regional actors vulnerable to those risks. CFN frequently argued that Northern Gateway generated unacceptable economic risks, linking unique regional ecosystems with local economies and identities. In an August 2012 press release (CFN, 2012, August 2), the organization decried the threats increased tanker traffic posed to the Great Bear Rainforest, a federally protected conservation area home to Indigenous and settler communities dependent on healthy marine ecosystems, whether for daily substance or long-term employment:

> The Great Bear is… one of the only places on our planet where intact coastal temperate rainforest, large wild rivers, and healthy cold-water seas come together….The forests, rivers, and seas represent daily food and a way of life for coastal communities and First Nations. The immense natural capital of this region sustains a diverse economy representing tens of thousands of long-term Canadian jobs, valued at billions of dollars annually.

CFN president Art Sterritt made similar arguments in a March 2012 report documenting the potential impact of increased tanker traffic on BC's North Coast. Sterritt claimed that "All the work we are doing to create a sustainable economy would be wiped out by an oil spill," which "would devastate fishing, tourism, and traditional subsistence harvesting, which are the backbones of the economy in the North and Central Coast and Haida Gwaii" (CFN, 2012, March).

The ENGOs made similar claims. One January 2012 SCBC post referred to a recent report "published by the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Pembina Institute and Living Oceans Society" (Sierra Club BC, 2012, January 23). Sierra explained how:

> The report details the dangers of bitumen transportation and the risks of spills to the environment and the economy in a region that depends on healthy fisheries, lands, and waters. At risk from an oil spill would be the approximately $250 million annually

> from commercial fishing, $550 million annually from recreational fishing, and hundreds of millions from nature tourism.

The Internal Frontier of the Regional Popular: Project Backers as Extra-Regional Elites

The articulation of an equivalential chain of demands was facilitated not just by the existence of shared risks, but recognition of their unfair distribution. Opponents' injustice frames explicitly attacked project-supporters as a cabal of powerful elites willing to impose harm on regional actors in the name of profit. The refusal of these elites to meet popular demands of different regional actors—for ecosystem protection, the safeguarding of local economies and industries, respect for regional autonomy, Indigenous sovereignty etc.—became the basis of a movement identity rooted in those actors' collective confrontation with a common oligarchic power. However, demands were also linked through their mutual reference to the importance of local places and the different actors that depended on or had claim to them in specific ways. As such, the bridging of these demands with regional spatial frames allowed opponents to establish an internal frontier dividing legitimate regional popular forces from "foreign" elites invading the region from the outside.

Dogwood especially favored this narrative, often contrasting the elite aggressors with the democratic agency of regional publics whose members were collectively dependent on healthy local ecosystems. In one online backgrounder, the group explained how:

> Some of the most powerful oil companies in the world are pushing to bring more and more crude oil tankers to B.C.'s coast. They would jeopardize the livelihoods of tens of thousands of British Columbians and the stability of the Great Bear Rainforest and southern Gulf Islands ecosystems in the name of profit. We can hold them back and keep our oceans and rivers healthy and livelihoods secure, but it's going to take size and diversity. That's where you come in (Dogwood Initiative, n.d.).

CFN similarly decried the inequitable distribution of risk and benefit, highlighting potential harms absorbed by Indigenous and settler actors. In a June 2012 press release (CFN, 2012, June 20) responding to the "third Alberta oil pipeline spill in [a single] month," CFN president Art Sterritt argued that "Enbridge's proposed Northern Gateway is a dangerous, short-sighted project that would make oil companies rich and leaves in its wake oil spills, environmental destruction and long-term economic damage to local communities." A March 2012 report issued by CFN outlining the risks from a tanker or pipeline spill made similar claims:

> The Enbridge Gateway project imposes an unnecessary and high risk to Coastal First Nations and other British Columbians. Despite the safety measures proposed by Enbridge, there is a high likelihood of a major oil spill and the impact of a spill would be devastating to the environment and the economy.… Enbridge expects Coastal First Nations and British Columbians to take all the risks of the project while almost all the benefits accrue to the oil and gas industry and Alberta (CFN, 2012, March).

The illegitimacy of extra-regional elites was often overtly contrasted with the popular legitimacy of opponents, who were described as broadly representative of the region's Indigenous peoples, settler communities, local workers and businesses, and environmentalists—all united in defense of "our coast." At times, this storyline was deployed as an ironic foil for Gateway supporters' own "foreign elites" narrative. Consider, for example, a 2011 press release from Dogwood critiquing commentary by Vancouver blogger Vivian Krause, whose research on US foundations funding BC-based anti-Gateway groups later inspired the federal government's "foreign funded radicals" storyline:

> In the face of mounting pressure from the largest pipeline company in Canada, an undisclosed consortium of international oil companies funding Enbridge's Northern Gateway project, and a pro-oil sands, pro-Northern Gateway federal government…, we have helped build a broad grassroots movement of working families, First Nations governments, businesses, chambers of commerce, municipal governments, tourism operators and fishermen willing to take action to prevent oil tankers from threatening our coast. ….
>
> None of the conspiracy theorists acknowledge that the fight to protect our coast from the threat of a catastrophic oil spill is a quintessential David vs. Goliath struggle—foreign-funded oil interests like Enbridge are outspending environmental groups working on this issue at least one hundred to one (Horter, 2011, August 16).

YDA deployed a similar storyline in response to the government's "foreign funded radicals" rhetoric in January 2012. In a press release, Nadleh Whut'en Chief Larry Nooski contrasted the alliance of extra-regional elites with the grassroots actions of Indigenous communities and their environmentalist allies:

> First Nations are… offended at the suggestion by the Prime Minister, Minister Oliver, and petro-lobbyists that foreign money is interfering in the process, Chief Nooski added, saying: "First Nations people are so opposed to this pipeline that we're pulling money out of our own pockets and community members are doing everything that we can so that our voices are heard. We are also proud of the wide-ranging support we've received from our neighbours across the north, and from environmental groups" (YDA, 2012, January 11).

Coastal First Nations articulated a similar internal frontier, contrasting the illegitimacy of the expensive public relations campaigns of wealthy Albertan corporations and Toronto-based ad firms with their movements' own regional democratic legitimacy:

> Enbridge's multi-million dollar ad campaign is an act of desperation to try to sell a project that clearly doesn't have the support of First Nations or British Columbians, says Coastal First Nations executive director Art Sterritt…

> Sterritt says that's why his organization has been reaching out to British Columbians across BC where they work and live. "It's unfortunate that Enbridge has chosen to hire a high-priced Toronto ad firm to try to tell us what we should think instead of doing the hard work of dealing with people on their doorsteps" (CFN, 2012, May 30).

At times this foreign invasion storyline was articulated with references to Indigenous peoples' experiences at the hands of Canadian colonialism and the exploitation of Indigenous territory by resource capital. One September 2012 CFN blog post issued by the Heiltsuk Nation strongly condemned Enbridge's behavior throughout the JRP hearings:

> The history of the Heiltsuk is filled with broken promises from various companies that have come into our territory and reaped the benefits of exploiting resources on which we have always relied upon… [leaving] our territory and our community with deep economic and environmental scars. There is little doubt that Enbridge would also fall into that category. Enbridge has clearly shown that it isn't a good corporate citizen – it's dishonest…, incompetent…, and a bully (characterizing opponents as revolutionaries, radicals) (CFN, 2012, September 20).

Regional Identities and Democratic Agency: Dismissing an Industry Captured Process

Opponent storylines explicitly linked demands concerning unacceptable risks to local ecosystems, industries and communities with related demands concerning regional democracy, regulatory capture by industry, and Indigenous sovereignty. Again, regional spatial frames provided a discursive affinity which facilitated the equivalential linking of these demands, as concerns about local places became articulated with anger over the violation of regional democratic authority and Indigenous sovereignty over those same places. This strengthened the internal frontier between the politically legitimate local actors forced to absorb risk and the extra-regional elites imposing those risks without consent.

Once opponents had established that frontier, they could undermine the symbolic authority of what they claimed was an industry-captured federal review, contrasting the illegitimacy of the regulatory regime with their own regional democratic legitimacy. This framing underpinned assurances of their political agency: the anti-Gateway coalition would win precisely because they were legitimate representatives of regional democratic publics and sovereign territories, while their enemies were illegitimate extra-regional interlopers.

Both Indigenous organizations in the sample contrasted the illegitimacy of an industry captured federal government with the legitimacy of their own claims to territorial sovereignty and regional solidarity with both Indigenous communities and settler British Columbians. YDA—which had issued the Save the Fraser Declaration, and whose members had refused to take part in the JRP—issued a December 2011 press release celebrating additional signatories to the declaration from regional Indigenous communities:

> First Nations, whose unceded territory encompasses the entire coastline of British Columbia, have formed a united front, banning all exports of tar sands crude oil through their territories....These First Nations form an unbroken wall of opposition from the U.S. border to the Arctic Ocean …. "The government can talk all it wants about pushing tar sands oil pipelines and tankers through BC. There is no way our Nations will allow it," says Chief Art Adolph representing the St'át'imc Nation. "If they're serious about respecting our rights, the government of Canada must stop pushing the oil companies' line that this is in the public interest… (YDA, December 1, 2011).

The following year, a YDA press release had strong words for the Harper government following Minister Oliver's foreign funded radicals remarks, linking concerns about community safety, an industry captured regulatory system, and violations of Indigenous sovereignty:

> "The fix is in with this government. How can any Canadian trust that the Enbridge review process will be conducted fairly and independently with Harper breathing down the review panel's neck?" said Chief Larry Nooski of Nadleh Whut'en First Nation, a member of the Yinka Dene Alliance. "It is ludicrous for the federal minister to parrot tar sands lobbyists by directly attacking our communities that have decided the Enbridge project is too dangerous, and against our laws," said Nooski. "We're not foreign—these are our lands."

Chief Nooski went on to discuss the strength and political efficacy of the alliance between regional First Nations and settler British Columbians:

> We have made a decision, in our Save the Fraser Declaration, to ban these pipelines and tankers. Tens of thousands of British Columbians have signed petitions specifically supporting our decision. The Enbridge project has unified us and we are not going to stop until we win this together.

At other times, the JRP's regional unaccountability was unfavorably contrasted with the democratic ethos of grassroots activism, as in a 2010 blog post by Dogwood's Swanson (2010, August 30) announcing an upcoming Vancouver rally:

> Our current Federal Government supports Enbridge's oil pipeline and tanker project, and has given decision-making authority to a review panel comprised of three non-British Columbians. This rally will help send the message that the majority of people in this province have made up our mind; and that our answer is no.

In framing the review process as an industry captured sham, opponents were well-positioned to dismiss the symbolic authority of the JRP when it did eventually approve Northern Gateway in December 2013. A press release issued immediately after the JRP's announcement argued that its "recommendation … [was] unsurprising given such a flawed process." Sierra

Club's Caitlyn Vernon explicitly framed the JRP's decision as an attack on regional actors whose concerns about health, economic well-being, and ecological sustainability were all undermined by Gateway's approval, arguing that it was "inconceivable how the panel could sit through months of heartfelt, scientific and economic testimony and fail to understand how the Enbridge proposal would negatively impact jobs, families and the salmon and clean drinking water we all depend on" (Sierra Club BC, 2013, December 19).

Opponents often contrasted the supposed illegitimacy of the JRP ruling with the legal and moral authority of Indigenous title. YDA made this point forcefully in a press release that highlighted the efficacy of the Indigenous-led movement while articulating a common popular front with settler British Columbians similarly dependent on the health of local ecosystems. The release quoted "Chief Martin Louie of the Nadleh Whut'en First Nation," who stated that:

> It's no surprise that a flawed process has led to a flawed recommendation. This project will never be built. The Yinka Dene Alliance has clearly refused permission for Enbridge's pipelines to cut through our lands and waters, and the federal and provincial governments must accept that this project cannot go ahead…Our position is clearly stated in the Save the Fraser Declaration, which bans Enbridge's Northern Gateway pipelines from our territories. Nothing is changed by the JRP's pronouncement. Enbridge is not from this place, does not understand our laws and customs, and will profit by damaging our environment now and into the future… We have put ourselves in the frontline for all British Columbians and together we are fighting for our homes, our future and our children's future (YDA, 2013, December 19).

Opponents often referred to regional public opinion polls as a means to undermine the legitimacy of the JRP ruling. Not only did a majority of those polled continue to oppose the project following the ruling, but:

> When asked whether they trust the review process, 51 per cent of British Columbians say they distrust the process, while only 32 per cent trust it… "These polling results bring home why the Enbridge tanker and pipeline proposal is going nowhere fast—despite the JRP recommendation," said Jessica Clogg of the West Coast Environmental Law Association. "Residents of B.C. continue to withhold [permission] for the project, while multiple First Nations lawsuits threaten to derail it and the government of B.C. [has] formally opposed the Enbridge project" (Dogwood Initiative, 2014, February 5).

Opponents contrasted the democratic illegitimacy of the project's extra-regional elite backers with the results of local elections and referendums. Following the April 2014 referendum in Kitimat, in which 58% of voting residents in the proposed pipeline terminus rejected the project 4 months after the JRP had approved it, Dogwood's Kai Nagata issued a blog post entitled "Let BC Vote." In it, Nagata advocated for the initiation of a province-wide direct ballot initiative on the grounds that the Kitimat referendum had proven that the anti-Gateway movement represented the will of British Columbians. Nagata argued that the referendum was a "battle between David and Goliath" in which "David [had] won," and celebrated the ability of local residents and grassroots activists to defeat Enbridge, the powerful energy company from outside the region:

> For weeks, a small troop of local volunteers… were knocking on doors and asking neighbors about their hopes and dreams for Kitimat. The group had $200 in the bank—just enough for some leaflets and handmade signs. Meanwhile, jets were flying in Enbridge executives from Calgary. As the company's paid canvassers fanned out across town, a relentless barrage of slick advertisements commanded residents to vote "YES" to a crude oil export terminal on their doorstep... In the end, the people in B.C. with the most to gain from Northern Gateway said "no thanks"… (Nagata, 2014, April 12).

Unsurprisingly, when federal cabinet issued Gateway's final approval in June 2014, opponents were quick to dismiss both the symbolic authority and practical efficacy of the government's decision. One Sierra Club BC (2014) press release denounced Cabinet approval as affirmation that "the Federal government is much more interested in representing the interests of oil corporations than the interests of ordinary British Columbians." Nevertheless, the government's announcement "changes nothing":

> The federal government has set itself on a collision course with the wall of opposition to the Enbridge pipeline and tankers project. British Columbians from all walks of life—including B.C.'s municipalities, First Nations, unions, businesses, and the provincial government—who care deeply about the communities and the province in which they live, have said no to Enbridge in no uncertain terms …. (Sierra Club BC, 2014, June).

CONCLUSION

Today, the Northern Gateway project is dead. In the 2015 federal election, the Conservatives were defeated by Justin Trudeau's Federal Liberals, whose party made significant electoral inroads in BC (Hume et al., 2015, October 19). Trudeau had campaigned to roll back the Harper government's strident extractivist agenda, promising to implement improved resource project reviews, develop a meaningful federal response to climate change, and pursue reconciliation with First Nations (Hume, 2016, January 13). A few months later, the Supreme Court sided with Gateway's Indigenous opponents, overturning the JRP ruling on the grounds that affected communities had been insufficiently consulted (Do, 2015, June 29). Shortly after, the new government formally rejected Gateway, whose resurrection would have required the initiation of another lengthy federal review process to ensure that the government had fulfilled its constitutional responsibility to consult and accommodate First Nations (Tasker, 2016, November 29). Though the rejection of Gateway by the courts was likely the proximate cause of the Liberal government's ultimate "rejection" of the project, one should not underestimate the underlying influence of the anti-Gateway coalition. After all, initiating another project review would have undermined Trudeau's newly won electoral support in BC, while inviting the negative press that would come with publicly battling a powerful,

organized and highly motivated regional social movement, many of whose members had just voted for him.

The ultimate demise of a project that had been strongly supported by many of the most powerful elites in the country indicates the importance of discourses related to ecological interdependence with particular places in the political framing of environmental politics. By articulating the Gateway project with a regional spatial frame, opponents were able to rearticulate popular understandings of the project's distribution of risk and benefit. From being the boon to the national interest described by its supporters, Gateway was transformed into a sinister conspiracy of extra-regional elites attacking the region and overriding its democratic sovereignty.

In our study, analyzing the concrete communications strategies of discourse coalitions emphasizes how activists use collective action frames to generate populist storylines designed to mobilize diverse movement constituents around a shared objective. In particular, our findings demonstrate how a focus on local places and spaces provided discursive affinities between different actors' demands. These affinities allowed Gateway to emerge as an empty signifier through which concerns about ecological sustainability, economic well-being, Indigenous sovereignty, democratic accountability, and social justice could be articulated into a common equivalential chain. This contributed to the emergence of a diverse and robust movement of First Nations, environmentalists, local settler communities and regional governments. Following Laclau, these actors came to construct a contingent popular identity based upon their mutual confrontation with extra-regional elites threatening their local economies, cultures, and communities.

As political theorists like Mouffe (2018) and public intellectuals like (Frank, 2018) argue, there is both historical precedence and theoretical justification for contemporary left populisms to challenge the ongoing rise of Right Populism not just in Canada but around the globe. Similarly, our study indicates that populism is not rhetorical terrain which must inevitably be ceded to the nationalist right when it comes to environmental and energy politics. That Gateway opponents were able to replicate yet reframe the same populist invasion narrative developed by Gateway's proponents gestures toward the malleability of populist tropes, and the potential for activists to articulate a counter-hegemonic populist politics. However, building on this potential may require acknowledging the limitations of Northern Gateway's regional ecological popular opposition.

First, one should not overstate the strength of the politically contingent alliances made between the project's First Nation and settler opponents. On the one hand, shared recognition of mutual interdependences with local places enabled heterogeneous regional actors to unite in opposition to extra-regional elites. This is not to imply that the place-based identities motivating settler opponents were of a kind with the deep and long-standing reciprocal relations between Indigenous peoples and their traditional territories that scholars like Coulthard (2014) describe. Yet there was clearly a discursive affinity between this normativity and the connections to regional place motivating settler opponents which enabled the emergence of a shared populist storyline.

However, the connections to place motivating settler opponents are, at least in part, rooted in the same settler colonial political economy which contemporary decolonial politics seek to transcend. As such, appeals to regional democratic sovereignty and economic well-being motivating local settler communities were often embedded in the very systems of property relations, territorial expropriation, and settler colonial governance at the heart of much contemporary discontent amongst Indigenous peoples. If settler communities and environmentalists are to grow their alliance with some Indigenous communities into a broader counterhegemonic challenge to Canadian extractivism, they will have to seriously consider how to constitute a meaningful politics of Indigenous reconciliation that goes beyond short-term alliances against specific projects.

Yet taking this path could complicate attempts to overcome a second limitation of the anti-Gateway movement. While an overwhelming focus on the regional and local enabled the articulation of particular populist narratives, it foreclosed others. Notably, said regional focus largely overshadowed broader discussions of the oil sands' contribution to climate change, the broadly inequitable structure of Canada's oil and gas industry, and the need for the Canadian state to coordinate a rapid post-carbon transition. While such concerns were certainly discussed—at times with great force—overall they played second fiddle to those oriented around regional well-being. This approach helped motivate diverse regional actors to fight against a particular local project that threatened local identities, ecologies and economies. But it did not provide a compelling platform for launching a broader conversation with Canadians outside of British Columbia about the need for a rapid course reversal in the country's drive to dramatically increase fossil fuel production. At some point, anti-extractivist activists will need to mobilize for meaningful federal policy to transition off fossil fuels, whether by phasing out oil sands production, funding renewable energy, or making massive investments in public transportation and green infrastructure. And it is difficult to see how any of this would be politically achievable without engaging with—and transforming—the Canadian state.

Contemporary political realities point in this direction. Today national support for tar sands expansion remains high, and in some ways the Liberals have emerged as industry's new best friend. As of writing, Trudeau has "approved several contentious bitumen transport and export market diversification projects, including the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain" Expansion project in BC (Neubauer, 2019, p. 17). Recently his government has even gone so far as to nationalize that project with $4.5 billion of public money, buying it from Kinder Morgan—a Texas oil company—just as it was looking to abandon the project in the face of continuing regional opposition in British Columbia (Chase et al., 2018). Liberals have also welcomed the Trump administration's approval of the Keystone XL project meant to connect Alberta bitumen with refineries in the Gulf. If completed, these projects will likely lead to major expansions in upstream bitumen production, potentially undermining attempts to lower national greenhouse gas emissions (Clarke et al., 2013). They have also further strained relations with Indigenous communities, some of which have opposed Kinder Morgan on grounds similar to those which motivated the anti-Gateway opposition.

In advocating for these projects, the Trudeau Liberals and other industry defenders in the media and civil society have doubled down on their claims that expanded oil and gas production is an essential precursor to maintaining national prosperity and serving the national interest. According to recent polls, a majority of Canadians across the country believe these claims (Bricker, 2018). Meanwhile, national emissions continue to grow at an alarming pace.

All this demonstrates the need for a serious Federal politics that can challenge that of extractivism's many supporters. In some respects, this should be easy. By design, the contemporary structure of Canada's oil and gas industry disproportionately benefits political and economic elites at the expense of ordinary workers and taxpayers (Neubauer, 2019). Yet establishing a national ecological popular politics will certainly complicate any attempt by settler environmentalists to strengthen their nascent alliance with Indigenous communities, as any simplistic attempt to wave the flag or draw upon Canada's colonial heritage runs the risk of alienating the latter. This calls into question how and if any emergent Canadian identity can be articulated with a meaningful political vision of what a left-progressive, ecologically sustainable, and socially just Canada reconciled with Indigenous peoples could be. And that involves not just a new discursive storyline, but a policy blueprint for a fundamentally transformed political economy. That's a high bar to reach. But it is one Canada's anti-extractivist movement may need to consider if it is to have any hope of reversing the catastrophic course their country currently finds itself on.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The datasets generated for this study are available on request to the corresponding author.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

RN conceived of and designed the study, collected, coded and analyzed materials, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. RN and SG developed analytical and theoretical framework and edited the manuscript. SG wrote sections of the manuscript.

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